

# Libraries and Homelessness: A Combined Social Work and Library Response Grounded in Human Rights

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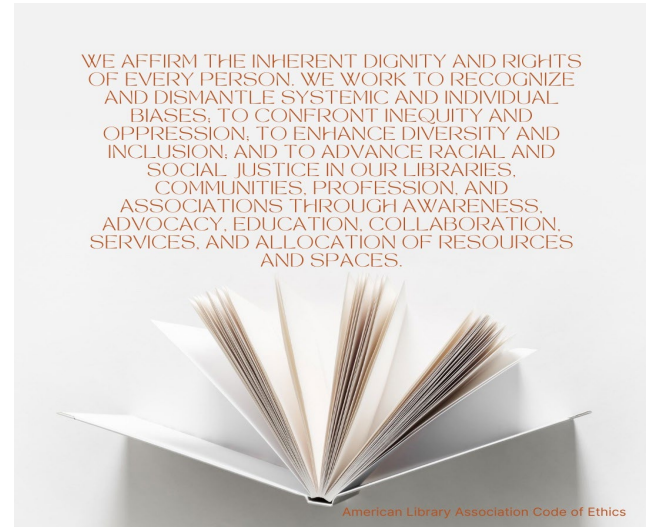
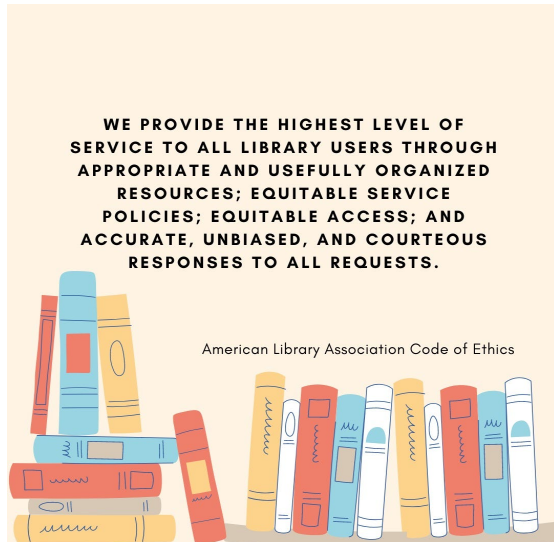
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# Libraries, Social Work and Human Rights

## Social Work Competency:

### Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice

Social workers respect and defend the human rights principle of indivisibility, and promote all civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.





# Library and Social Work Partnership

- Program began in 2014 with one intern and now has 16 students in 24 libraries
- Library Social Work students work on micro, mezzo, and macro levels
- Tasks include meeting with individual clients, providing assessments and referrals for any needed service, and oftentimes this becomes case management in that the student helps the client with the process of obtaining services
- Support groups: recovery groups, anxiety management, caregivers
- Community workshops, including narcan training, voter registration, blood drives
- Staff trainings on LGBTQ+ issues, crisis management, mental health and social services



# Homelessness in Patchogue - Medford, NY

- According to the 2020 Census, Patchogue has an 8.22% poverty rate
- Long Island estimates that about 3800 people who live here are homeless
- Patchogue-Medford Library is located in the heart of Patchogue Village, which is in walking distance of the train station and a few bus stops
- The Village is home to many restaurants and local businesses, new apartments and condominiums, and some low -income housing developments
- The Village also has a small group of people experiencing homelessness that primarily stay in the Patchogue Village area



# How the Library has Responded to Homelessness - Programs and Resources

The Patchogue-Medford Library has instituted a variety of programs and policies that support the homeless population that frequent the library:

- Community Cares Brochures - includes resources on housing, DV, shelters, and more
- Pocket card for food resources, including soup kitchens and pantries
- Food pantry and community fridge at the library
- Librarians share info with each other on resources for housing apps, any new services available, etc., so that everyone can share it with patrons in need
- Transportation schedules are available
- Hygiene products (including feminine hygiene), space blankets, and ponchos offered to protect people from the elements



# More Programs and Resources

- Free summer lunches for kids (under 18 years old) no questions asked, licensed food handler
- Flu shot van
- HeLP program - social work, nursing and public health students are stationed in the library bi - weekly to provide health information and some case work services to patrons in need



# Library Responses - Policies

The Transient community is welcome in the library, and the policies support this. The Library sees working with the homeless population as an opportunity to engage the population, not as a problem:

- Equity based policy - the library tries not to ban patrons
- Security Guards: non-confrontational, invite and engage with people, the uniform is a red jacket, not a “typical” security uniform, they work with team, and provide resources to patrons
- Ryan Dowd sensitivity training for all staff, De-escalation techniques, Team Aid



# Library Responses - Administrative Support

- The administration is supportive of the homeless population and works to create policies and programs that are protective and equitable
- Administration is also supportive of the staff, provides training, resources, and creates an environment where staff can work with each other, the community, and the homeless population
- If staff feel someone is not appropriate or is becoming verbally abusive, they are encouraged to report that to an administrator; staff safety is paramount. At the same time, reports must be substantiated, in that staff cannot just refuse to work with someone out of their own discomfort





# Library Responses - Welcoming Spaces

- Copy center - Offers full service assistance with everyday faxing and printing needs. Additional equipment includes copiers where the first 10 pages are free and scanners (free)
- The Library Pages started a “Pay it Forward” program with the “tips” that people want to give them - the money goes to help people pay for their copies and faxes
- Fine free Library - the library found the fines affected the marginalized more than any other group
- Allow people to use microwave, open cans, provide bags, community fridge
- Charging station with lockers



# Digital Access - a Human Right

“A typical public library devotes much of its staff time and space to free computer and internet access, digital literacy courses and one-on-one assistance, job search and application training, and help with navigating government forms and obtaining social services. These elements of libraries are central to ensuring that community members have the equitable chance to get basic services, become educated, become employed, be civically engaged, and communicate effectively, all of which are human rights. Further, many public libraries find very localized ways to support human rights and foster social justice in their communities by responding to very specific local needs” (Jaeger and Sarin 2016, pp 327).

- Digital access- to ensure that patrons can adequately use all of the digital services at the library, schedules and staffing are structured so that they can assist patrons with longer transactions
- No appointment is needed, which for the homeless population is important
- Desks have been moved so that staff can assist patrons with computer needs
- Bilingual staff are always available



# Barriers Encountered

- Some members of tented communities prefer to live outside versus a shelter.
- Some people do not want to be separated from their family members when provided with a housing program.
- Difficult to engage homeless community with formal workshops or events.
- Navigating bias views and attitudes towards homelessness.
- Gaining the trust of members of the homeless population who are well established in the area.



# Thinking Ahead - What Else Can We Do?

- More training for library staff
- More buy-in from staff
- More partnerships
- More networking with community agencies
- More social workers on staff
- Education for community to reduce bias



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